

DHCD ESG Frequently Asked Questions for SFY14 Rapid Re-housing Programs

Please note: The information provided by DHCD may not apply to RRH programs funded by Entitlement Communities.

1. In the webinar it was stated that households must be placed within 30 days of their enrollment date. The Interim Rule states that Housing Stability Case Management can only be conducted for 30 days prior to housing, but the Housing Search and Placement activities do not have time limits. Do households in fact have to be placed within 30 days of enrollment into the RRH program?

Answer: Since Housing Stability Case Management includes conducting the initial evaluation required for ESG RRH, including verifying and documenting eligibility, DHCD believes that Housing Stability Case Management begins on the day that the household is enrolled in the program and may not exceed 30 days during the period the household is seeking permanent housing.

Additionally, HUD stated in their SNAPS-Shots #3 (available at <https://www.onecpd.info/news/snaps-shots-3-esg-requirements-for-case-management-to-help-ensure-housing-stability-rapid-re-housing-and-homelessness-prevention-assistance/>) that if the household needs more than 30 days of housing stability case management assistance, while they are sleeping in an emergency shelter or other place not meant for human habitation, it must be charged to either the Emergency Shelter or Street Outreach component.

Therefore, DHCD interprets the rule to mean that households must be placed into housing within 30 days of their enrollment date into a RRH program.

2. What types of activities and timeframes are allowable prior to housing, and how do those activities change once someone is housed?

Answer: A DHCD ESG eligible household is eligible for any service under either service component (category 1: housing relocation and stabilization services & category 2: short-term and medium-term rental assistance) at any point while enrolled in the ESG RRH program with the following two exceptions:

1. Credit repair (under Category 1: Housing Relocation and Stabilization Services) – credit repair is not an allowable expense under the DHCD ESG RFR. While DHCD recognizes the significance of credit repair services specifically pertaining to housing, we believe there are a significant amount of programs that offer credit repair services across the Commonwealth and have therefore decided to not fund credit repair with the limited ESG dollars we receive.
2. Temporary storage fees (under Category 1: Housing Relocation and Stabilization Services, (6) Moving Costs) – Per the Interim Rule moving costs may include payment of temporary storage fees for up to 3 months, provided that the fees are accrued after the date the household enrolls in the program and before the household moves into permanent housing only.

Please remember, RRH services are only available to the extent necessary to rapidly re-house a household and stabilize them within that housing. Therefore, DHCD expects that services necessary to place an individual in housing (rental application fees, security deposits, last month's rent, utility deposits, moving costs, housing search and placement, housing stability case management, and, if necessary, rental arrears, mediation, and legal services) will be offered prior to housing, and services necessary to keep a household stably housed will be offered after placement (utility payments,

housing stability case management, mediation, legal services, short-term and medium-term rental assistance.) Some services, such as housing stability case management, will be received by a household prior to and after placement in housing.

3. Do we need to collect social security cards for children of family households?

Answer: Yes, please collect SS cards and birth certificates for children within an eligible household.

4. The Record Keeping Requirements guidance removed language around serving individuals who are exiting an institutional stay of 90 days or less but who were either on the street or in shelter prior to that institutional stay. Can you please confirm that the definitions for FY14 are the same as FY13? More specifically, can ESG-RRH continue to serve individuals who may have short stays in an institution but whose primary residence is a place not meant for human habitation or emergency shelter?

Answer: Yes, DHCD ESG RRH programs may continue to serve individuals who may have short stays in an institution but whose primary residence is a place not meant for human habitation or emergency shelter as long as they client or households meets the DHCD ESG eligibility criteria.

5. Can you confirm that security deposits paid on behalf of publicly subsidized tenants can in fact exceed Fair Market Rent (FMR)?

Answer: Yes, security deposits to help households move into subsidized or unsubsidized units may exceed FMR. FMR & Rent Reasonableness standards are only required when a household is receiving services under the Rental Assistance category of services (short-term rental assistance, medium-term rental assistance, and rental arrears.) Security deposits are considered a service under the Housing Relocation and Stabilizations Services category.

6. The only time that we can find that families would not be eligible for RAFT but would be eligible for ESG, is if the family is over 50% AMI. Do we need to document in any way that a family was ineligible for RAFT or document that families tried RAFT prior to offering ESG services? If so, would we go to DHCD for this documentation?

Answer: There is no requirement that families be ineligible for RAFT in order to receive ESG assistance. RAFT is meant to provide homelessness prevention services, whereas ESG Rapid Re-housing programs are focused on households that are already literally homeless. While there may be some families that may be eligible for both programs at once, they may not receive both services at the same time. A household that is determined eligible for RAFT at the same time they are determined eligible for ESG RRH should consult with a Case Manager to determine which program can best meet their immediate needs in order to re-house them and stabilize them within that housing.

Please remember that RAFT and Emergency Assistance (EA) are two separate programs. Households must be ineligible for EA to qualify for ESG assistance. However, verification of ineligibility is not required. If a household is in a non-EA shelter, they meet the non-EA eligibility criteria for RRH services. If a household is in a place not meant for habitation, the ESG RRH program is not responsible for determining if the family qualifies for EA assistance and may serve them immediately given that they meet the eligibility requirements. Additionally, if a family is residing in a place not meant for habitation, please contact Elisa Bresnahan at DHCD (elisa.bresnahan@state.ma.us). There may be additional resources that can be dispensed to assist the family in need.

7. DHCD stated on the webinar held on 8/7/13 that providers should not be pursuing documentation of homelessness from non-EA shelters to confirm family eligibility. DHCD provided a list of factors that would make someone non-EA eligible. Can you please confirm that we are not required to pursue shelter or other documentation of homelessness if a family meets the non-EA eligibility conditions outlined in the PowerPoint? If more documentation is needed, does DHCD have written guidance for family eligibility documentation?

Answer: To be eligible for DHCD ESG RRH assistance families must be non-EA eligible. Documentation of homelessness must be verified. It is non-EA eligibility that does not need to be documented by the RRH program. Documentation of homeless can be documented in the case record through a letter from the non-EA family shelter that the household is currently residing in. If a family is residing in a place not meant for habitation, documentation must be provided by an outreach worker or other homeless service provider that is able to document that the household is sleeping in a place not meant for habitation.

8. Please confirm that RRH programs are not required to submit a Quarterly APR to DHCD, as was the case in SFY13.

Answer: Correct, RRH providers are not required to submit an APR on a quarterly basis. Rather the APR should be monitored regularly by the DHCD ESG funded agency for data quality. A final APR must be submitted to DHCD at the end of the contract period by July 10th, 2014. RRH programs may be asked to run an APR to be reviewed during an ESG site visit, but an APR is not required to be submitted quarterly to DHCD.

9. The new guidance notes that providers need to follow up and provide case notes on referrals made on behalf of clients. Can you please elaborate as it seems that the requirement to track all of these activities will be very difficult to meet. The day-to-day referral activity of individual providers seems to be more information than is necessary in order to monitor actual outcome progress for this program. In addition, all mainstream health care, non-cash and cash benefit changes are reported through the APR which should fully satisfy anything DHCD needs to know about a program's ability to link individuals to various mainstream services.

Answer: The record keeping requirement by DHCD for ESG case management services to document notes and/or copies of referrals to mainstream benefits and other resources and follow up notes on whether the household was able to access the service/benefit is not a new requirement and was included in the Recordkeeping & Reporting Requirements provided for SFY13.

A formal tracking system to monitor all referrals provided is not necessary as, like stated, the APR will help to monitor how many clients entered the program without access to mainstream benefits but exited with access to mainstream benefits. Rather, DHCD is looking for documentation of the natural progression of case management services. Each case file should have case notes and written documentation that referrals to other services were provided, if applicable, and that the case manager followed up with the client during subsequent case management sessions to identify if there was any difficulty in accessing that service. Verification within each case record that a referral service was received is not necessary as the time it takes to access a service may take longer than the length of time that the client is enrolled in the program. However, as part of the case management process,

Case Managers should be aware of any difficulty a client may have encountered in accessing a service (i.e. the referral contact provided was unreachable) and, if necessary, should provide assistance to the client in trying to access the service to the extent that is practical for the RRH program.

10. Please provide clarification about the lease being signed between the “owner” and/or “landlord”.

Answer: HUD has provided the following guidance to DHCD regarding the lease.

“A property manager, management company, or landlord that is legally empowered to act on behalf of the owner may sign the lease agreement on behalf of the property owner.

Please note: this answer applies specifically to DHCD ESG RRH programs and may not apply to other HUD funded programs that offer rental assistance (specifically programs funded by a Continuum of Care.)”

11. DHCD stated that the Rental Assistance Agreement with the landlord must be between the landlord and the entity that actually writes the checks. This seems unfeasible in our current structure, please elaborate.

Answer: The Interim Rule states that “an ESG recipient or sub-recipient may make rental assistance payments only to an owner with whom the recipient or sub-recipient has entered into a rental assistance agreement.” DHCD interprets this to mean that the rental assistance agreement must be between the property owner or landlord and the entity that actually writes the check for rental assistance.

Given the unique program design of some of our RRH programs, DHCD believes that a rental assistance agreement which identifies the sub-contracted agency, that is working with the owner/landlord, as an agent of the lead agency making payments to the owner/landlord should meet the requirements of the Interim Rule. We have submitted the question to HUD for further guidance and will share their response with our RRH contractors once it is received.

12. DHCD stated in the webinar that grantees must report on the retention of clients from FY13. Does this only include those clients who were carried over from FY13 to FY14, or does this include all FY13 clients?

Answer: Per the SFY13 ESG RFR & SFY14 ESG RFR, successful awardees must track and report on housing retention status of all ESG clients quarterly for 12 months. Therefore, DHCD expects that the quarterly housing retention reporting will include clients that received services in SFY13. We understand that programs may not be successful in reaching the client or LL from SFY13, but the attempt to gather housing retention information should be made.

13. The Quarterly Retention reporting requirements asks grantees to ask clients/landlords “if they owe rent”. This is quite intrusive into the client’s housing and we believe would raise questions and anxieties from landlords. We will report on the quarterly retention (is the client stably housed), but asking landlords if a client owes rent to them does not seem programmatically helpful nor does it create a space for fostering and maintaining landlord participation. Do we have to ask about rent?

Answer: During housing retention follow up, the question “do you owe rent” as asked to the tenant or “does the tenant owe rent” as asked to the LL is meant to help determine if the household remains stably housed. Being in a permanent housing unit does not necessarily mean that a household is stably housed. A household may be in housing, but on the verge of eviction due to non-payment. In such a case, asking whether or not rent is owed can help determine if the household is in need of continued stabilization services if still enrolled in the RRH program or, if no longer in the RRH program, a referral to a homelessness prevention program. RRH programs may find that asking other indirect questions may help you to determine if a household is stably housed and/or in need of referral services. ESG providers will not be penalized if it is unknown if a household owes rent at the time of the housing retention follow up. However, every effort should be made to determine if the household is in fact stably housed within their unit.

14. The monthly and quarterly reporting now goes above and beyond what was required before. We anticipate tremendous difficulty meeting the new reporting requirements given the already high burden of paperwork and the time spent working with clients and landlords. Given that our program was very successful and met all compliance and reporting needs in FY13 can we provide the supplemental report on a monthly basis rather than using the monthly report template DHCD provided?

Answer: DHCD is aware that the reporting requirements have changed since the SFY13 contract year and that the change to monthly reporting adds to the administrative burden of operating an ESG program. However, the information that will be provided to DHCD through the monthly report will help us to better evaluate the number of clients successfully being placed into housing throughout the contract period. Providing the supplemental data to DHCD on a monthly basis rather than providing the monthly report means that DHCD would then have to complete the monthly report for the contractor. Therefore, DHCD does expect that each contracted agency submit a monthly report per the instructions provided through the Recordkeeping & Reporting Requirements and the RRH webinar hosted on 8/7/13.

The RFR clearly stated that DHCD would require monthly performance reports and that respondents should expect to report on the number of households enrolled in the program and the households successfully served on a monthly basis. While the monthly report was not developed at the time of the RFR, DHCD is not requesting information through the monthly report that should not be easily accessible to contractors who are effectively tracking clients and monthly expenditures.

15. What income documentation is required for households requesting RRH assistance?

Answer: Eligible households DO NOT have to meet an income requirement at intake to receive RRH assistance. However, DHCD expects complete income information to be gathered and kept in the case record in order to complete the income assessment in HMIS and assist the household with creating a Housing Stability Plan.

Third party verification of income is sufficient income documentation for the case record. In the case that third party verification is not available, a written statement from the third party, or a self-declaration of income from the client will suffice. Please refer to the SFY14 RRH Recordkeeping & Reporting Requirements for more specific information regarding income documentation.

16. To meet the requirements for a housing stability plan is a form necessary?

Answer: HUD has said that ESG providers must develop a plan with each RRH household on how they will retain permanent housing after the ESG assistance ends. While a specific form is not required, it is recommended by DHCD. DHCD also recommends utilizing the housing stability plan as a guide for case management services. Therefore, the housing stability plan should identify how the household will retain permanent housing after ESG assistance ends, taking into account the household's current and/or expected income and expenses, and other public or private assistance for which the household may be eligible for. If a form is created, the form should be supplemented with such items as documentation of income, documentation of benefits, referrals to services, etc. Depending on the household, the plan may include such activities as job search, budgeting workshops, volunteering, following up on child care services, and paying rent on time. Each household's housing stability plan will be different based upon the needs of the household and what it will take for that household to become stabilized.

17. Does quarterly housing retention tracking coincide with the contract quarterly supplemental reporting?

Answer: No, supplemental reporting on housing retention is due to DHCD each quarter after the contract start date (October 10th, January 10th, April 10th, and July 10th.)

Housing retention follow up for each household enrolled in your DHCD ESG RRH program is required every three months after the household has been placed into housing. These dates do not necessarily coincide with the quarterly reporting due to DHCD. For example, if a household is placed in housing with a lease start date of 7/17/13, a housing retention follow up will then be due on 10/17/13, 1/17/13, 4/17/13, and 7/17/13. The information gathered during the housing retention follow up will be provided to DHCD in the subsequent contract quarterly reporting period.

18. How long are stabilization services required for households that have been successfully placed into housing?

Answer: There is no required amount of time that ESG RRH programs must offer housing stabilization case management. However, DHCD recommends keeping households enrolled in the program for approximately 3 months. Monthly housing stability case management offered over a period of 3 months should provide enough information to the case manager as to whether or not the household has stabilized in their new housing unit or if continued ESG assistance is necessary. We realize that some households may stabilize immediately within their unit and may be successfully exited from the program after only 1-2 months of ESG assistance. However, some households may not stabilize immediately and may need ongoing services for 7-8 months, for example, before they successfully stabilize in their new unit. DHCD encourages ESG RRH programs to consider housing stability on a case by case basis rather than applying a blanket rule as to how long a household can be enrolled in your DHCD funded RRH program.